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## Of Tobacco and Wellbeing in Indigenous Amazonia

‘[Tobacco] shows me the reality of things. I can see things as they are.  
And it gets rid of all the pains.’

Ashaninka shaman to Narby (1998: 30)

‘Smoking [tobacco] killed at least 100 million people worldwide last century, and ten times that will meet the same fate in the 21st century if present smoking rates persist.’

(Kohrman 2008: 10)

### Introduction: The Everyday Use of Tobacco in Indigenous Amazonia

I will never forget the first time I saw an Ashaninka<sup>1</sup> man blow tobacco smoke on his young child. I was drinking manioc beer with a group of Ashaninka men when I suddenly noticed Sebastian, our host, blow tobacco smoke on the top of his son’s head, followed by his hands, and then his feet - long puffs of smoke that the child seemed to find soothing. I knew what Sebastian was doing to his young son (getting rid of the *susto*<sup>2</sup> that affected him), and I knew that he knew what he was doing (even if untrained, every Ashaninka man carries some shamanic knowledge, many times just mimetic). I had felt a similar soothing feeling a few days earlier when a *sheripiari* (an Ashaninka shaman) had blown tobacco on my crown. Still, I could not help but flinch: tobacco smoke on a child? In the UK I instinctually move my cigarette away when I walk past small children, and am now used to smoking outside pubs in the Scottish winter or to being banished to people’s gardens or doorsteps. To be fair, my Ashaninka informants have not been exposed to constant warnings on second hand smoking, although they are told that smoking kills every three months during the visits by the brigades of the Peruvian Ministry of Health, and packs of cigarettes now have health warnings printed on them.

How, if tobacco is ‘the world’s greatest cause of preventable death’ (Kohrman and Benson 2011: 329), do we start to understand and explain its important place within different indigenous Amazonian ethoi of wellbeing? This is especially complicated when we take into account that a large number of studies on wellbeing in Euro-American societies have health as one of its key aspects, or even as synonymous with it (see, for example, Mathews and Izquierdo 2009 for a model of wellbeing involving health, happiness, and prosperity). Most studies on wellbeing come from the domain of psychosocial health, based on an understanding of wellbeing in terms of mental health (e.g. Deci and Ryan 2008). Some studies focus on the detrimental influence of tobacco, bundled with other ‘harder’ drugs, on human wellbeing. Yet Izquierdo has shown that even if Matsigenka people (an indigenous Amazonian group closely related to Ashaninka people) are getting healthier according to objective measures, ‘they feel that their wellbeing is in drastic decline’ (2009: 67) due to the impact of extractive industries working in their territory. The important role tobacco plays in indigenous Amazonian ideas of wellbeing is obvious in ritual practice, ranging from its use in healing (e.g. Narby 1998: 119) to its use in practices aimed at the fabrication of human beings (e.g. Londoño-Sulkin 2000: 171). These findings are unsurprising as most studies of tobacco use in the region centre on the ritual use of the plant. By contrast, I am interested in tobacco’s non-ritual uses in the Ashaninka pursuit of *kametsa asaiki*.

*Kametsa asaiki* (‘living well’) is aimed at the creation of the *Ashaninkasanori* (‘real Ashaninka person’) through the teaching of three interconnected knowledge sets. The first is the control of antisocial emotions (e.g. anger, jealousy, stinginess and sadness) and the everyday practice of the socially constructive ones (e.g. love and happiness). The second is

adopting and displaying an ethos of hard work and being generous with the product of such work. The third is related to the second and is associated with relationships of care (e.g. feeding, bathing and protecting) between people who relate to each other as *Ashaninkasanori*. An important aspect of these relations is the emphasis on commensality and the enjoyment of socially productive substances (e.g. 'real' food, medicinal plants) whilst avoiding the negative ones. These three sets of knowledge are evidence of the hard work that goes into the creation of Ashaninka *cuerpos fuertes* and *caras felices* ('strong bodies' and 'happy faces'). Ashaninka people are no strangers to the use of tobacco (*pocharo*) in these processes. Wilbert (1987: 126) notes that Ashaninka people enjoy four out of the six uses he found for tobacco in Amazonia: drinking, licking, taking as snuff<sup>3</sup>, and smoking, but not chewing it or using it in enemas.<sup>4</sup> Historically, tobacco was commonly used as *sheri* (tobacco paste), made from boiled down tobacco leaves. This form of tobacco lends its name to the Ashaninka shaman, the *sheripiari*. Weiss (1975: 62) translates *sheripiari* as 'he who uses tobacco' and 'he who is transfigured by tobacco', whilst Elick (1969: 203-204) suggests the word combines *sheri* and *piai* ('a rather common designation for the shaman in northern South America'). Baer (1992), translates the Matsigenka term *seripigari* as 'he who is intoxicated by tobacco'.

One of the many things I looked forward to as I prepared for fieldwork amongst Ashaninka people was the chance to smoke their tobacco or taste their tobacco paste, which I had read was mostly used for shamanic purposes. I was not only curious of its taste but also of its renowned potency. Texts based on fieldwork in the 1960s (Elick 1969; Varese 2002; Weiss 1975) describe tobacco paste, commonly used at the time, as a bittersweet and very strong substance that could induce hallucinations. This is not surprising as Narby, working with Pichis Valley Ashaninka groups, highlights that their tobacco 'contains up to eighteen times more nicotine [than] Virginia-type cigarettes.' (1998: 120) My informants say that *sheri* was so strong because some Ashaninka men combined *kamarampi* (*ayahuasca*, *Banisteriopsis caapi*) and tobacco for a potent paste.

This chapter steps away from the analysis of the use of tobacco in ritual practice, important though that is, to concentrate on the everyday use of the plant.<sup>5</sup> I am not claiming that the everyday use of tobacco utterly contradicts the meanings and symbolism it carries in ritual practice or shamanic discourse. Rather, I want to show the important links that exist between tobacco and wellbeing outside ritualistic activity. For this I will look at the everyday uses of tobacco amongst people living by the Ene and Bajo Urubamba rivers of Peruvian Amazonia. These two areas have very different historical experiences, an important element when considering tobacco use.

The first part of this chapter will discuss how the planting of tobacco by Ashaninka groups in the Ene River is part of a larger reconciliatory effort in the wake of the Peruvian internal war (officially 1980-2000). This conflict was caused by *Sendero Luminoso*'s attempt to topple the Peruvian state, and led to the deaths of between 6000 and 8000 Ashaninka people, out of almost 70000 deaths in the whole country.<sup>6</sup> Ashaninka villages include people who were active on different sides during the war, and people who lost family or friends due to the violence. The current Ashaninka project of reconciliation not only seeks to create convivial relations amongst people, but also the rearticulation of their social relations with *aipatsite* ('our earth/territory/soil') and the powerful spiritual agents living within it. Ene Ashaninka people posit that the perceived lack of soil productivity and game they are currently experiencing is due to the anger of *aipatsite* and the different *ashitarori* (*dueños*, 'owners'/'masters') at what happened during the war. The violence also led to the fleeing of *maninkari* spirits ('those who are hidden', 'good forest spirits') who aid *sheripiari* in their healing practices and guide the souls of the dead to the afterlife. Any possibility of renewing

their pursuit of *kametsa asaiiki* is impossible without an attempt to enjoy positive social relations with *aipatsite*. Ashaninka people not only need the 'real' food they plant and hunt in the forests but also need to reclaim their living spaces from the wandering souls of the dead who have become demons.

The second part of this chapter explores the everyday use of cigarettes by Bajo Urubamba Ashaninka people. These groups seldom plant tobacco, instead buying it as cigarettes or in leaf bundles (*mapacho*) from *mestizo* traders. I will argue that, in this case, the use of cigarettes cannot be understood separately from the consumption of other manufactured goods such as clothing, radios and *trago* (cane alcohol). For this, I will look at the meaning attributed to these goods by those who purchase and consume them. From this I will propose that cigarettes are one of the objects that my informants use to define being "Peruvian" and "civilized". Their enthusiastic consumption of these goods allow them to access the world of Peruvians, 'become Peruvian', and through this interact as *Ashaninkasanori* in a context of state oppression, colonisation and extractive industries, that make it harder for them to live in their desired way. So, rather than being a tool of colonial or capitalist control, cigarettes are part of a set of tools that enables them to be who they want to be.

### Of Tobacco and Reconciliation in the Ene River

Although I have only made short visits to the Ashaninka villages by the Ene River, I have met many people that were born in that area but left it during the worst years of the war to find refuge in villages of the Bajo Urubamba, Tambo and Ucayali rivers. I have also enjoyed long conversations with Ene Ashaninka people in Satipo, the largest town in that area.

Evelina, one of my *comadres* in the Bajo Urubamba, left the Ene in the early 1990s. She went first to a *nucleo poblacional* (camp for internally-displaced people) set up by the army and the indigenous self-militia (Sp. *ronda*, Ash. *ovayeriite*, 'the warriors') in the Tambo River, after which she moved to the Ucayali, and finally to the Bajo Urubamba. Evelina longed for the Ene and kept in touch with her family via radio but was very cautious about going back. She tried to convince me not to go and warned me:

*Compadre* you have to be very careful, things over there are not *conforme* ['agreeable' but really denotes normality]. The land has been made to taste too much blood from all the violence, people have tasted too much blood, they have killed and so they are not like us... People can't go back to where their houses used to be, their kin have been killed and left [in the forest] unburied. Many of my kinsmen died there, it was very sad... They say that the *maninkari* have left to the higher areas<sup>7</sup>, disgusted with all that happened and now there are only *kamaari* ['demons'], making people sick.

Similarly, one of Caruso's (2012: 126) Ashaninka informants in the Ene River told her that 'the bloodshed was huge in these forests, and that also had a big impact on the *maninkari*... The *maninkari* are good people, good spirits, who don't like being around evil... They don't like death and blood, and all of this was a great shock to them... They went far away, into the highlands.' I have recorded more narratives stating serious worries about the departure of *maninkari* spirits and about the wandering souls of the dead in the Ene as well as the Tambo River, which also saw a lot of fighting.

Weiss notes that Ashaninka people fear the souls of their dead because 'the souls of the dead can, and usually do, become demons.' (1975: 302) I was told that these souls, carried by sadness and solitude, roam their former homes to visit their kin and attempt to take them to the afterlife for company. During Weiss' fieldwork (late 1960s) the houses and

all the possessions of the dead were burnt to prevent these houses from becoming 'a focal point of ghostly or demonic visitation' (ibid.: 433). This is more complex if we take into account that my informants also consider that *Sendero* cadres were demons, and that 'the soul of someone who has been attacked by a demon, and only such a soul, will itself become a demon after death unless destroyed by fire' (ibid.: 435). This complicates any return to their former villages as people were not buried properly and their houses were not burnt. Hence, there is a possibility that the ghosts of the deceased might return as demons, would not recognize their former kin and would attack them. Weiss writes:

Demons consider human beings... their legitimate prey. [The] hordes of evil spirits in the universe are driven by an insatiable urge... to attack and inflict maximum damage upon any human being they encounter... they inhabit, not the ends of the earth as do the good spirits, but actual [Ashaninka] territory... and thus constitute an ever-present danger (ibid.: 165).

The role of *maninkari* spirits is key in assuring rest for the souls of the dead as they are called upon to guide these souls to the afterlife. For example, Weiss describes a burial practice in the Perene River that:

includes notifying the *maninkari* of the death by whistling over a cupped hand at the gravesite... The *maninkari* then come and... [the deceased] accompanies them body and soul back to their place of residence... up on the mountain ridges or up in the sky, becoming *maninkari* themselves... They look down from their vantage points at the living, and... they descend to visit (ibid.: 438).

War pushed *maninkari* spirits to reclusivity. Thus, the souls of the Ashaninka killed in the war are trapped, and are possibly becoming demonic. This would make them unable to recognize their kin and attack them. Souls that do not depart with *maninkari* spirits also risk becoming *peari*, 'the soul of a dead person, or any demon for that matter, taking the form of a game animal' (ibid.: 290).<sup>8</sup> A *peari* is recognized as 'emaciated, [with] pustules, tumors, or patchy fur, is infested with worms, or has unhealthy-looking organs' (ibid.) and is never eaten.

I later asked Evelina about life in the Ene before the war. She said:

Oh *compadre*, it was beautiful! So much game, so much fish... My father would always find something [in the forest], bring it back to our house and my mother would cook it and we would eat it happily. We had feasts, people would come and visit to drink manioc beer and dance, people would play their drums, their flutes... It was beautiful! We lived peacefully... But life there is very different today, there is not as much game or fish... Some people have not been able to throw their sadness away [after the war]... they fight when they get drunk, they don't know how to live well.

Evelina makes a definite connection between people not knowing how to live following *kametsa asaiki* precepts and her perceived lack of game and fish. Another Ene Ashaninka woman told me that the reason for the lack of game in the area was that the owners/masters were angry for the abuses committed against their animals during the war. I enquired if this was due to over-zealous hunting but she replied it was because soldiers and *Sendero* cadres had raped those animals.

Many Ashaninka people worry about the perceived lack of *aipatsite*'s productivity since the war. Emilio told me that *aipatsite* had not only reduced its usual yield due to the bloodshed but also because of extractive industries and cocaine production:

It's different now. When I was young plants grew huge! It was easy, people knew the *ivenki* [magical plants] for many plants, and they grew beautifully! But now I hear people can't grow their plants so easily, the land is not the same... it's like it doesn't want to produce [*producir*] any longer... it's angry with people for all the deaths... it's tasted so much blood... And all those chemicals being used when they make cocaine upriver makes it worse... There are those plans to build the dam at *Pakitzapango* that we hear about on the radio that will flood [the area]... and all the *empresas* ['companies' but refers to extractive industries]. It makes me so sad.

Similarly, Julio told Caruso (2012: 126) that:

[T]he soil changed after the violence. Until 1991, there were many good places to plant crops... But many places, after the war, began to dry up, like a punishment. Or perhaps because so many people were killed, or maybe we shouldn't have buried the people where they died – maybe they were buried in sacred places. It seems that we've bothered the land [*la hemos molestado a la tierra*], which is a part of ourselves. Also our produce was always good before the war, but no longer.

The imagery of *aipatsite* soaked with blood fits with *Sendero*'s plan in which violence was 'the Redeemer... the Mother of History' (Degregori 2011: 67). Indeed, Abimael Guzman, *Sendero*'s leader and ideologue, insisted each village would be required to pay its quota of blood as part of the one million lives it would take to topple the Peruvian state. Ashaninka narratives of war tell of murder and torture, and of how people in *Sendero* camps were fed human remains, including fetuses, breasts and penises (Sarmiento Barletti 2011). These actions transformed former Ashaninka kinsmen into demons, preventing them from recognizing their former friends and family.

*Aipatsite* was exposed to human and demonic cruelty during war and now the state and other outsiders continue disturbing it with plans for a hydroelectric dam, exploratory tests for gas and oil extraction and the production of cocaine. The resulting lack of productivity threatens *kametsa asaiki* as it is impossible to create *Ashaninkasanori* without the food they plant and hunt for. Thus, the project of reconciliation in the wake of war is not only aimed at former combatants and victims but also includes the refashioning of human relationships with *aipatsite*, which is key for any renewal of the pursuit of *kametsa asaiki*.<sup>9</sup> Space prevents me from expanding on these reconciliatory efforts but I want to focus on the important role of tobacco in rearticulating social relations in this area.

Ethnographies dealing with Ashaninka people highlight the close relationship between tobacco and *maninkari* spirits. According to Weiss (1975: 260), even if the *maninkari* by definition 'cannot be seen', humans can nonetheless see them 'by the continual ingestion of psychotropic drugs, especially tobacco and *ayahuasca*.' Similarly, Narby (1998: 118) points out that '[*maninkari*] spirits had an almost insatiable hunger for tobacco.' This link is common elsewhere in the region. Wilbert (1987: 173-74) lists fifteen different Amazonian societies who consider tobacco as a food for the spirits. Likewise, Sullivan (1988: 653) writes that 'tobacco smoke is a prime object of the craving of helper spirits.' Similarly, Yagua people consider tobacco 'a food for the spirits in general' (Chaumeil 1983: 110), the people of the Vaupes 'considered [tobacco] to be... the food of spirits' (S. Hugh-Jones 1979: 210), Bororo people pay tobacco to *bope* spirits 'for their activities on behalf of men' (Crocker 1985:



202), and the Matsigenka shaman feeds his crystals 'tobacco daily. (...) [If not] his auxiliary spirits, which materialize in the crystals, will leave him' (Baer 1992: 87).<sup>10</sup>

Tobacco shamanism is an important part in how Ashaninka people deal with the sadness they say takes control of some of them in the wake of war, leading many to committing suicide (Caruso 2012: 109). Yet, the everyday use of tobacco is also important in their reconciliatory projects as they cultivate tobacco in their gardens as the plant, and not just its smoke, attracts *maninkari* spirits back from exile and repels demons who abhor tobacco.<sup>11</sup> Gray (1996: 136) makes a similar point by stating that '[tobacco] is cultivated by Arakmbut men to keep away harmful spirits, and C. Hugh-Jones (1979: 110) writes that tobacco is used by people in the Vaupes to cleanse a house after a death. One of my informants noted the power in tobacco, as the plants are frequented by the *tsonquiri* (hummingbird), considered as an important shamanic aide.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, it is also in the actual work involved in cultivation that people show *aipatsite* their resolution to live moral lives together and leave the violence of war behind. By cultivation I am not only referring to tobacco but also to the foodstuffs (e.g. manioc, rice) and cash crops (e.g. coffee, cocoa) that are now key to the Ashaninka economy. Families organize *minga* work parties and invite their kin and close friends to help them open new gardens or harvest their crops. These are instances of group work that are described as happy or beautiful moments as people joke and drink manioc beer throughout the workday, which ends with a meal prepared by the family organizing the *minga* for all attendees. These instances of group work are counterpoised to how non-indigenous Amazonians in the area are said to avoid working in large groups, understood as them showing a lack of care for their kin. The war made *mingas* impossible as men were constantly patrolling and there was no easy access to manioc beer. Today Ashaninka people can *trabajar tranquilo* ('work peacefully') with whomever they want to invite to their gardens, actively showing themselves as socially productive beings displaying an ethos of hard work that is an important part of *kametsa asaiki* and of relating to *aipatsite* in a positive manner.

Thus, Ashaninka people are creating positive social relationships with *maninkari* spirits and *aipatsite* as part of their communal process of reconciliation. The cultivation of tobacco allows them to attract spirits back to their territory and also show *aipatsite* that people are working hard at the moral relationships put forth in *kametsa asaiki*. We can see that Ashaninka post-war processes are not just about going back to a romanticized past, but about re-articulating the ties between Ashaninka people, *aipatsite*, and *maninkari* spirits to face the new challenges presented by their current social and political context.

The planting and use of tobacco in the Ene River does not mean that Ashaninka groups do not buy cigarettes, they do, but I will argue that we must consider the purchase and consumption of cigarettes from a different analytical angle. Let's move to the Bajo Urubamba to show what I mean.

### **Tobacco and Peruvianness in the Bajo Urubamba**

Miqueas asked, as I took another drag of the cigarette we were *pichangueando*<sup>13</sup>, 'Juanito, what are those cigarettes called? Are they Peruvian?' I handed him the pack of Golden Beach cigarettes, which Miqueas inspected whilst I explained that the brand name was English. 'Ah, so they are *gringo* cigarettes?' Miqueas asked as he handed the pack back to me, seemingly confused. I said I was not sure, and looked on the side of the pack to find out they were made in Peru. Miqueas seemed happier: 'So they *are* Peruvian cigarettes! No wonder they are so good and strong!'

Golden Beach cigarettes are not the nicest I have ever smoked but they were very cheap in Lima and readily available in bars and shops in Atalaya, the district capital. Currently, a pack of cheap cigarettes cost four *Nuevos Soles* (£1), or four cigarettes could be purchased for £0.25. For comparative purposes, my Ashaninka informants are paid £4 for a day of work, £6.25 for a large live chicken, and around £0.25 for a kilo of husked rice. In Atalaya, £1.25 bought two kilos of good rice, a gallon of *trago* (cane alcohol), half a gallon of the cheapest petrol, a night in one of the most inexpensive hostels in town, a used t-shirt, two shotgun shells, or a plate of food in the town's market.

I asked Miqueas about the strength of the tobacco we were smoking: surely it was not stronger than the tobacco used in *sheripiari* practices. I told him I had smoked tobacco in the Ene River and it had made me feel sick as I had inhaled it when I should not have. Miqueas agreed, 'You don't know how to smoke that tobacco... it's strong!' But he also said things are different in the Bajo Urubamba: '[Ene Ashaninka people] still know how to plant tobacco or know how to use *sheri*... There are no good shamans left [in the Bajo Urubamba], that's why you hear so much about witches.<sup>14</sup> Our ancestors knew how to work that tobacco but now we don't.' It was generally agreed that the best shamans were in Atalaya and that they were not indigenous. But even so, the very few *sheripiari* I know in the area have replaced the diagnostic and healing use of tobacco paste with *mapacho* tobacco purchased in Atalaya and smoked in rolled-up cigarettes or pipes.<sup>15</sup> I was assured that the use of *mapacho* did not negatively affect the healing processes.<sup>16</sup> Whilst factory-made cigarettes are avoided in *ayahwasca* ceremonies, I have seen men blow cigarette smoke on their children, and Elick recorded cases of *sheripiari* using cigarettes in the 1950s (Elick 1969), again on children.<sup>17</sup>

At the time I wondered why they went from using a substance they produced or gathered (there are some species of wild tobacco) to one they had to purchase with the little money they made. My informants are not reluctant to plant cash crops as they grow, amongst many others, rice, coffee, cocoa, and different kinds of beans. These they sell in Atalaya, or keep for their family's consumption or to sell to other villagers. Most Ashaninka men I met smoke, albeit at very different degrees, and it was not rare to see women smoking either, although never in the same *pichangas* as men.<sup>18</sup> In fact, one of the first Ashaninka phrases I learned was *pipoka*, roughly translated as 'do you smoke?' So, why spend money on tobacco when you could grow it? I soon realised I was posing the wrong question, influenced by my desire for my informants' self-sufficiency at a time when the colonist/capitalist frontier further complicated their lives. My doctoral fieldwork coincided with renewed attempts by the Peruvian state to limit indigenous land tenure, an expansion of permits for gas exploration and extraction in the area, plans for a series of hydroelectric dams, the continuous presence of cocaine producers and traders in the area, and open state repression against indigenous Amazonian protesters that lead to the tragic events at the *Baguazo* (5 June 2009), labeled by the international press as the 'Amazonian Tiananmen'.

Upon my arrival, I had been heartbroken by the general lack of 'traditional' material culture, with every household owning a series of industrially produced goods. My host Joel apologised as his electric fan had stopped working the previous week (although I still do not know if he was joking). The very few people that owned a *cushma*, the long traditional tunic, only ever wore them for political meetings and even then still preferred to wear trousers and shirts. I soon learned that the wages men earned from working timber and the meagre profits families made from selling cash crops were used to buy goods like televisions and DVD players which were rarely used as their owners could seldom afford to run the village's electricity generator. Families in the area had received corrugated metal sheets for their



houses as compensation payments from a petrol company but even if everyone exalted how beautiful the houses looked, very few slept in them as the roofs made them unbearably hot in the dry season.

Today, the organisation of 'beautiful' villages resembles the organization of Peruvian towns. Villages are made up of houses built in very close physical proximity to each other, as opposed to the dispersed settlements in which their ancestors lived in the past. Houses are organized in grids, usually around a centre that includes the football pitch as a sort of plaza. This area is surrounded by public buildings (e.g. the school, medical post, communal house) and a place for a mast and Peruvian flag. Also, most Ashaninka people in the area are completely bilingual in Ashaninka and Spanish. The majority of them use the latter in their daily interactions, to the point that most young people can understand Ashaninka language but do not speak it fluently. As opposed to other areas, it is not common for people to have Ashaninka surnames, and those young parents who do prefer to give their children surnames in Spanish. From afar this might look like acculturation and I initially associated their attitude as forced change driven by the intense and cruel process of debt-slavery and colonisation that indigenous groups in the area faced until a few decades ago (see Gow 1991, 2001; Garcia Hierro, Hvalkof and Gray 1998). I could not help feeling that they had finally succumbed to decades of governmental pressure to become Peruvian 'multicultural' citizens and individual consumers. I quickly realised how wrong I was.

Stephen Hugh-Jones, reflecting on the issue of material goods in indigenous Amazonia states '[T]here is something deceptively straightforward about the oft-repeated story of forest Indians, seduced by worthless trinkets, pressured to accept unwanted and unnecessary goods, turned into indiscriminating consumers forced to sell their labour and produce on a ruthless market, who begin by losing their heads, and end up losing their autonomy and their culture as well.' (1992: 51) In a similar vein, Fisher (2000) shows that the goods owned and desired by Xikrin Kayapo people, which an outsider might consider as unnecessary luxuries, are actually an essential part of their social reproduction. I want to follow these analyses that highlight the importance of examining manufactured goods beyond their obvious utilitarian value to understand the everyday consumption of cigarettes amongst my Ashaninka informants in the Bajo Urubamba. I propose that this consumption is only one aspect of the way they understand their current identity as *civilizados* ('civilized') and *peruanos* ('Peruvians'), which reinforce their pursuit of becoming an *Ashaninkasanori*.

Ashaninka people posit that all beings are made from both material and immaterial substances from very different origins and acquired through different relationships. Thus, "Peruvianness" is defined by the consumption of material goods such as those listed above, including cigarettes. Here I follow Santos-Granero's statement that 'scholars... have overlooked the material dimension of people-making processes by focusing mainly on the social relations that go into the making of a person' (2012: 183). Yet, the 'thing' is not separated from social relations. As I have showed elsewhere (Sarmiento Barletti *forthcoming*), the acquisition of material goods from without Ashaninka society has become key to their pursuit of *kametsa asaiki* and the fabrication of people as *Ashaninkasanori*.

I must clarify something before moving on. My Ashaninka informants understand being Peruvian as separate from citizenship. They distinguish Peru as a nation, which they imagine themselves a part of, from *el estado*, the Peruvian state. The state is an exogenous oppressive force, associated with extractive industries, unfair laws aimed at limiting their territory, and even *Sendero*. Contrastingly, my informants are proud of being Peruvian. This is obvious from the countless hours they spend practicing the national anthem in front of the Peruvian flag in the run-up to Peru's independence day, their pride at having *DNI*s (the

Peruvian identity card), at having a title for their land and, for some, at having ‘served the fatherland’ (*servir a la patria*) by enlisting for military service<sup>19</sup>. Peruvianness is also implied in the use of industrially made clothing and other Peruvian products. This consumption is explained as part of a process of ‘becoming Peruvian’ in which they tap into the “civilized” knowledge of Peruvians.

My Bajo Urubamba informants identify themselves as “civilized” and contrast themselves to the Ene Ashaninka people who they imagine as ‘not having civilized/woken up yet’ (*todavía no han civilizado/despertado*), reflected in their use of traditional clothes and face designs, and eating a diet closer to that of their ancestors. The related notions of ‘being civilized’ and ‘being Peruvian’ are now an important part in the everyday fabrication of *Ashaninkasanori*. Veber (1998: 384) notes that ‘the notion of civilization is borrowed from settlers but carries somewhat different connotations and meanings... “becoming civilized”... refers primarily to the acquisition... of non-native knowledge that may allow a wider range of maneuver vis-à-vis, and control over, relations with settlers.’ So, if Ashaninka people include a series of manufactured goods in their everyday practices, they do so because they allow them to enjoy a different perspective: the “Peruvian” perspective. Vilaça argues (2010) that Wari’ people’s desire for these goods cannot be reduced to their use value, but should be understood as responding to their desire to explore the perspectives of “whites”. Basing her argument on Viveiros de Castro’s (1998) discussion of Amazonian perspectivism, Vilaça argues that Wari’ people want these goods in order to acquire the knowledge associated with ‘being white’ and thus to ‘be Wari’ being white’ (Vilaça 2010). Thus, whilst it used to be that only shamans had the possibility of engaging with two different perspectives simultaneously, Wari’ people in general are able to do so when they consume manufactured goods associated with “whites”. Like Wari’ people, my informants are Ashaninka whilst being Peruvian. Thus, they consume cigarettes, one of the many signs of “Peruvianness”, as a creative engagement that strengthens their everyday pursuit of *kametsa asaiki*.<sup>20</sup>

Cigarettes are definitely understood as being non-Ashaninka products. Some of my Bajo Urubamba informants who studied at the Catholic missionary schools in the Tambo River in the 1970s and 1980s associated smoking cigarettes with the Peruvian and Spanish priests in these missions. The missions were places where they had changed their traditional clothes for shirts and trousers and had learned how to eat chicken and sweets. The otherness of cigarettes is also present in the stories of how people learned to smoke as this was usually done in non-Ashaninka settings, the two most common being timber camps and during military service in which Ashaninka men interact with *mestizos* for months at a time. Both of these instances were also cited as moments that allowed men to learn or improve their Spanish. As such, being or not being able to smoke cigarettes conveys a person’s ability to interact with outsiders in a “civilized” manner.<sup>21</sup>

Even if my informants may smoke cigarettes as a way of being Peruvian this does not mean that they do it in the same way that other people living within Peru do. I suggest that this is related to how ‘as far as Ashéninka are concerned, they themselves are the centre of their world; other people may have their own centres, but these are not important to the Ashéninka’ (Veber 1998: 384). This lets them place everything around them in an order based on their own categories, and so they define and control definitions of “Peruvianness”. For example, an irate Ashaninka man in a communal meeting I attended, after being told that the Peruvian government would build a hydroelectric dam in the area, asked, ‘Is this government Peruvian?’ Similarly, I was repeatedly told that *Sendero* cadres and petrol companies were not Peruvian. As I mentioned earlier, cigarettes are commonly smoked in groups, at least in pairs. Some of my informants pointed this out as an Ashaninka way of

consumption as it reflects the way in which manioc beer and food are ideally consumed. My informants point out that, as opposed to *mestizos* in Atalaya, they share in the consumption of these substances to show that they care for each other.<sup>22</sup>

Even when smoking in bars in Atalaya we all smoked from the same cigarette, passed from man to man. The filters of the cigarettes shared in these rounds would come back to me soaked in the saliva of every other man in the round, which is why my informants did not share cigarettes with just anyone. I have never seen Ashaninka people get into *pichangas* with *mestizos* or Andeans, but then, the people that my informants identify as such would probably not partake in the rounds due to their prejudice of indigenous Amazonians as unhygienic. I understood the idea of consubstantiality in smoking better when I noticed my *compadre* Chato picking up all of the cigarette butts we left behind after smoking in his house, carefully disposing of them in the area where his family also threw away leftover food. At first I thought he was just tidying up, or trying to hide how much we had been smoking. But I was wrong, again, as Chato explained: 'You can't just leave these lying around *compadre*, there are lots of witches [in these villages].' Cigarettes and left over food, like fingernails and hair clippings, carry with them parts of their users, and can be used against them by a *matsi* ('witch'). I thanked Chato, and he advised me, 'it is not like it used to be, there are no powerful *sheripiari* to deal with witches'.

In a sense, sharing cigarettes, and also *trago*, allows men to associate without needing female labour to provide them with the means for sociality.<sup>23</sup> Manioc beer parties, or even a leisurely drink at sundown, are not possible without the participation of women as they are the ones that prepare it. The circles of smokers of cigarettes and drinkers of *trago* allow people to reach the highly desirable state of *shinkitaka* (Sp. '*mareacion*'; in this context referring to drunkenness)<sup>24</sup> faster than by drinking manioc beer. This makes cigarettes and *trago* into an important part of contemporary Ashaninka sociality at a time when there are not enough of the desirable resources (e.g. game) to redistribute to other households. In today's *pichangas*, cigarettes stop being a thing to become invested with the properties of social relations that are important for *kametsa asai*.

### **Conclusion: Learning from the Everyday Use of Tobacco in Indigenous Amazonia**

It seems as if the power that indigenous Amazonians attribute to tobacco in shamanic or other kinds of ritualistic practice is so strong that anthropological analyses have ignored the less explicitly "mystical" everyday functions of the plant. There are many studies outside anthropology of everyday uses of tobacco in different "cultures" (usually equated to nationalities) aimed at finding ways to get people to smoke less, guided by Euro-American models that equate wellbeing with health.

Based on how Ashaninka people add tobacco to the factors that contribute to their wellbeing, I want to propose a question to a wider scholarly debate that I have posed elsewhere (Sarmiento Barletti *forthcoming*): to what extent do discourses and ideas of wellbeing reflect ways of thinking about the world? Briefly, with the rise of personal wellbeing as both a popular concept and a notion of 'virtue' that is in high demand, most wellbeing research tends to focus on self-knowledge, individual agency and self-responsibility. These studies are characterised by a lack of attention to cultural variations in understanding and usage of the term. Ashaninka people's uses of tobacco in their pursuit of wellbeing may clash with Euro-American conceptions of the "good life", but it also shows that different conceptions of humanity beget different approaches and discourses of wellbeing (see Sarmiento Barletti and Ferraro n.d.).

Even if smoking kills, the different uses of tobacco amongst Ashaninka people are all related to *kametsa asaiki*. In the Bajo Urubamba River what looked like a tool of the colonial/capitalist frontier for the transformation of indigenous people into individual consumers turns into an instrument aimed at becoming and being Peruvian. This is an identity that reinforces *kametsa asaiki* and thus being an *Ashaninkasanori* at a time when colonial/capitalist pressures make it harder to do so. In the Ene River tobacco becomes one of different ways through which people create positive social relations with *aipatsite* and the *maninkari* spirits after the violence they all experienced during the Peruvian internal war. This discussion highlights how there can be different approaches to tobacco not just between but within an Amazonian society, and shows how different uses and conceptualizations of tobacco are shaped by the historical context in which particular groups live.

Reviews of the anthropological literature on tobacco call for more critical studies on the power relations involved in tobacco industry, advertising, and smokers, especially when it comes to indigenous societies (Kohrman and Benson 2011). I agree with how necessary these studies are. For example, Brady (2008) has shown how colonists calculatingly exploited Australian Aboriginal people's addiction to nicotine, and by that imperiled them both economically and biosocially. Yet, Ashaninka people present a different case, not only because tobacco is a native plant but also because they conceive of themselves as 'masters of the Universe' (Veber 2000: 18), rather than the 'victims of progress' whom Bodley (1972) prophesied would soon be exterminated in an ethnocidal catastrophe. Oppressive powers such as the state, extractive industries and *Sendero Luminoso*, in attempting to control Ashaninka social practices, may have transformed their society but have not changed their conception. The resilience of Ashaninka social practice is illustrated in their desire to pursue *kametsa asaiki* in spite of the obstacles set by these and other outsiders.

Rather than one of control, the Ashaninka experience of tobacco is one of a creative rearticulation of relationships and models of identity that grants new symbolic and practical uses to different forms of this plant as part of communal projects through which people seek their desired mode of wellbeing. Tobacco empowers more than just Ashaninka *sheripiari*, who create relationships with spirits in order to heal, protect, and provide for their people. The everyday use of tobacco allows my informants to become *Ashaninkasanori* by becoming more Peruvian, in a process of Peruvianness that is defined by markers they have set themselves. But it also allows them to become *Ashaninkasanori* by inviting spiritual outsiders into everyday social interaction and actively mending the relationships that were broken during the cruelty of war.

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## Notes

1 Known as *Campa* until the 1980s, Ashaninka people are speakers of an Arawakan language. Estimates put their population at around 100,000 people, with most of them living in Peruvian Amazonia. Around 2,000 of them live in the Brazilian state of Acre.

2 'Fright'. Category of behavior disturbance caused by contact with different kinds of neutral or evil spirits. See Rubel, O'Neill and Collado (1985), and Logan (1993).

3 Weiss includes the name for snuff tubes in his list of Ashaninka words but makes no reference to snuff in his text, based on fieldwork in the 1960s. Elick makes no mention of snuff in his thesis, based on fieldwork in the 1950s and 60s.

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4 I have been told that some Ene River *sheripiari* do chew tobacco (Sandro Saettone, pers. comm.).

5 See Overing and Passes (2000) for an argument in favour of an analysis of indigenous societies based on their everyday life.

6 See Degregori (2011) for a general but insightful account of *Sendero* and the war in the Peruvian Andes and Caruso (2012) and Sarmiento Barletti (2011) for accounts of the conflict in Ashaninka territory.

7 '*Kanuja*'. These areas are imagined as pristine, rich in game and other resources, and inhabited by Ashaninka people living like their ancestors used to.

8 Ideas of the wondering dead are common elsewhere in Amazonia (e.g. Lagrou 2000: 152).

9 Bovensiepen (2009) makes a similar point in her study of post-conflict landscape rehabilitation in East Timor. By living, growing and reproducing on the lands of their ancestors, her informants renew their group's relationships with the earth.

10 Elick found the same practice amongst Pichis River *sheripiari* (1969: 208-209).

11 It is worth noting that in parts of the Ene River people plant tobacco close to their houses rather than in their gardens which are usually away from villages (Sandro Saettone pers. comm.).

12 A similar point was made by Weiss' informants, who consider *tsunkiri* as the owner of tobacco (1975: 259). The neighbouring Yanesha people also make this link (Santos-Granero 1991: 111).

13 Denotes 'sharing' but I am not sure of its origin; my informants only use it in reference to cigarettes. Ashaninka people rarely smoke alone, unless there is a specific reason for doing so like avoiding the ruthless *manta blanca* fly or repelling demonic spirits when walking in the forest at night. *Pichanga* is a word commonly used in the Peruvian coast for informal football matches but I have been told that it can also be used as a euphemism for group rape in *mestizo* Amazonia.

14 People in the Ene River said the same thing: the good *sheripiari* died during the war. Many people showed dissatisfaction with the *sheripiari* who survived, as they had not used their supposed power to counter the *Sendero* (Antonio Sancho, pers. comm.).

15 Although the form of the material has changed, the techniques employed are still very similar. Tobacco paste requires *sheripiari* to hold the paste in their mouths and then to spit it on to the afflicted area. Smoking from pipes/rolled-up cigarettes requires them to hold the smoke in their mouths, and then to blow it on the affected area. In both cases they then suck the afflicted area to extract the cause of the affliction.

16 Some informants proposed that *mapacho*, as it comes from outside Ashaninka villages, is 'more powerful' than the tobacco cultivated by *sheripiari*. As Laenerts points out for another Ashaninka group, 'the most interesting ethnomedicinal plants are deemed to be those from people living closer to the urban society (...) [T]hose plants must be powerful, because Western or mixed-blood people are obviously powerful... Real health depends on your place in the world, i.e. your interconnection with other living beings, rather than on a local chemical reaction in some particular part of your body' (2006: 143). Gow (1994) has made a similar point concerning *ayahuasca* in Western Amazonia.

17 This suggests a different stance to cigarettes than that of Matsigenka people (see Rosengren 2006:809) who make sharp distinctions between cigarettes and shamanic tobacco. Perhaps the huge influx of money and material goods into Matsigenka villages as compensation payments by petrol companies has affected this distinction as cigarettes are so readily available. It is noteworthy that I only saw cigarettes used by Ashaninka people



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during healing practices involving children. This may have to do with the different relationships that shamans and non-shamans have with tobacco in its different forms and with children's 'weaker' bodies.

18 Smoking rounds, like manioc beer rounds, are gender-based.

19 This creates a complex Peruvianness that may pose obstacles to conviviality in villages as young men leave the armed forces with ideas of masculinity and leadership that clash with Ashaninka ones.

20 There is a possibility, which I have not discussed with my informants, that the use of manufactured goods does not challenge their Ashaninkaness because these goods were originally Ashaninka. A myth proposes that whites only have the knowledge to produce industrial goods because they kidnapped Inka, a *sheripiari* who knew how to produce these goods. In a sense, all Peruvian goods *are* Ashaninka, or transformations of Ashaninka products. See Weiss (1975: 419-425) for an account of the myth.

21 As opposed to Nahua or Amahuaca people who until recently raided timber camps for manufactured goods.

22 An Ashaninka person has only ever offered me a cigarette to smoke on my own during anniversary feasts. These were usually offered by young friends of mine, advertising that they could afford them!

23 Of course, smoking as a form of socializing is not uncommon elsewhere. See Kohrman's (2008) work in Chinese hospitals, Nichter's (et al. 2004) work on how North American women smoke in groups to lessen negative perceptions or Reed's (2007) work in a Papua New Guinean prison. The latter is closer to the Ashaninka case as groups of inmates share cigarettes, and men are strategic about who they share a smoke with.

24 I can only agree with Weiss' (1975: 243) statement that '[t]he ideal psychic state of the [Ashaninka] is one of inebriation.'